

Taiwan's New Southbound Policy and Disaster Preparedness Cooperation: The Cross-Sectoral Partnership in Practice

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Abstract

Natural disasters are common challenges faced by Asian countries and seriously threaten people's lives and social stability. Therefore, more adequate regional cooperation is needed to jointly respond. As Taiwan has actively promoted the people-centered New Southbound Policy (NSP) since 2016, various initiatives and plans to strengthen social resilience and common interests have been implemented one after another. Among them, the NSP cooperation with specific focus on disaster prevention and HADR is of specific importance. The initiative is a positive and pragmatic move to promote partnership between Taiwan and its neighboring countries. This article delineates the common challenges and threats facing the Asian region - natural disasters. It - with the analysis of how the NSP serves as a facilitator for Taiwan's cooperation with partner countries in disaster prevention thereby fostering forge resilient partnerships. In fact, academic research on this critical topic remains relatively scarce. Since the NSP's cooperation on disaster preparedness encompasses the cross-sectoral partnership, mirroring the essence of the identical to the P-P-P-P modality. This aspect merits thorough investigation and deeper exploration, it is indeed worthy of in-depth investigation. Hence, this article is structured into four parts. The first part works as the introduction, the second part delves into introduces the rationale behind the NSP, focusing on that is, the P-P-P-P cross-sectoral partnership., while the third part addresses how the

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NSP facilitates disaster prevention cooperation and what are outlines its defining characteristics? Finally, the article concludes by offering insights and prospects for the NSP.

Keywords: *New Southbound Policy, disaster preparedness, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, disaster resilience.*

1. Introduction

It has been over seven years since Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen launched the New Southbound Policy (NSP) in 2016.¹ The NSP now stands as Taiwan's key regional strategy for Asia² (Office of President, 2017). The NSP's achievements thus far are promising, with President Tsai emphasizing in 2022 that it lies "at the center of Taiwan's own Indo-Pacific strategy" (Office of President, 2022). In the last seven years, the NSP has significantly bridged the gap between Taiwan and its Asian partner countries. Despite political constraints imposed by Beijing's One China Policy, Taiwan's pragmatic approach through the NSP has effectively strengthened cooperation with its neighbors (Marston and Bush, 2018). By fostering e people-to-people exchanges and collaboration, Taiwan has accumulated robust and multifaceted partnerships over the past years. These partnerships span various domains such as economy and trade, industrial link, education and talent cultivation, medical care and public health, and social connectivity, cultivating into a network of channels for cooperation.

Taiwan's NSP places a strong emphasize on fostering reliant partnerships through a people-centric approach. Unlike other regional powers with formal diplomatic ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries that allow them to participate in the ASEAN-related meetings, Taiwan seeks to bolster its influence through informal diplomacy and people- to-people connection. However, Taiwan's NSP is still somewhat similar to the regional approaches of other middle powers in the Indo-Pacific region such as South Korea's New Southern Policy (the NSP-K)³ and the Southeast Asian Policy of Japan (Yang and Hsiao, 2023). Similarly, within the framework of the NSP, Taiwan strategically employs soft power and further amplifies the projection of its warm power⁴ (Hsiao and Yang, 2022). In particular, through the sharing of its best practices on development issues and resources, Taiwan has concretely been strengthening the socio-economic

resilience of the regional community. The NSP's prioritization of people-centered development aligns closely with the well-being of individuals and societal resilience within the region. As a result, the NSP adeptly meets the specific demands of partner countries and localities, serving as a cornerstone in highlighting Taiwan's impactful presence and contributions to the region through pragmatic partnerships.

The NSP gained momentum since 2017, particularly with the focus on the five flagship programs under the Executive Yuan (EY) driving the public sector initiatives. However, the government's commitment extends beyond these five flagship programs administered by five key ministries. The whole-of-government approach involving over 13 ministerial agencies has transformed the NSP into more than a foreign policy framework; it has evolved into a comprehensive development strategy, firmly embedding Taiwan within the regional community (Hsiao and Yang, 2022: 22).

While the NSP primarily prioritizes economic engagement in response to regional development demands, this article diverges from the common narrative by shedding light on significant aspects beyond economic and investment factors. It aims to explore overlooked issues in media and literature, emphasizing the shared interests between Taiwan and partner countries. Additionally, it delves into how the NSP employs pragmatic approaches to achieve these mutual objectives. This article contends that the NSP fortifies common interests and nurtures cooperation through what can be termed as P-P-P-P configuration. (Yang, 2022a).

Undeniably, one of the most paramount challenges in Asia involves the persistent threats posed by both natural and manmade disasters. In view of this, this article delineates the common challenges and threats facing the Asian region - natural disasters. It analyses how the NSP serves as a facilitator for Taiwan's cooperation with partner countries in disaster prevention thereby fostering resilient partnerships. Notably, academic research on this critical topic remains relatively scarce (Yang and Wu, 2020). The NSP's cooperation on disaster preparedness encompasses cross-sectoral partnership, mirroring the essence of the P-P-P-P modality. This aspect merits thorough investigation and deeper exploration.

The article is structured into four parts. The first part serves as the introduction, the second part delves into the rationale behind the NSP, focusing on the P-P-P-P cross-sectoral partnership. The third part addresses how the NSP facilitates disaster prevention cooperation and outlines its

defining characteristics based on the author's participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Finally, the article concludes by offering insights and prospects for the NSP.

2. Practicing the NSP through the P-P-P-P Cross-Sectoral Partnership

The NSP operates within a cross-sectoral configuration, incorporating the public sector (government), the private sector (enterprises and business), and the people's sector (NGO, civil society or local communities), each operating independently yet collaborating synergistically. This approach bears resemblance to South Korea's NSP-K, another Northeast Asian middle power, which similarly underscores the significance of the public-private partnership, (P-P-P cooperation) (Yun and Galas, 2023; Yang and Hsiao, 2023: 350). Nevertheless, Taiwan's P-P-P-P configuration takes an additional stride by emphasizing the pivotal role of NGOs and civil society as crucial drivers. The article utilizes the P-P-P-P configuration as an analytical framework to examine the NSP's disaster preparedness cooperation. Its goal is to highlight the whole-government approach of policy implementation, backed by cross-sectoral support from Taiwanese society for the NSP. This framework aligns with prevailing academic discussions and literature exploring Taiwan's presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Yang, 2018; Scott, 2019; Hashmi, 2023; Yang and Matsumura, 2023; Yang, 2023b). Hence, the following analysis unpacks the NSP and disaster preparedness cooperation through the perspective of the cross-sectoral configuration.

A. The Public Sector: Government-led Efforts in Disaster Preparedness Cooperation

Taiwan's public sector has taken a lead in implementing the NSP. For instance, the Executive Yuan (EY) has launched five flagship programs since 2017 led by five ministries and coordinated by the Office of Trade Negotiation (OTN) under the Minister without portfolio, John Deng, to facilitate administrative resources in implementing the NSP, including the economic, trade and industrial links shouldered by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA), the international education cooperation and talent cultivation executed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) has also launched the One Country One Center

(OCOC) program to facilitate international cooperation on medical care and public health, while the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) advances regional agriculture projects, including setting up of the demo farms in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The fifth flagship program on social connectivity has been facilitated by the OTN and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), among other governmental agencies from the civil society part, Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF) is a partner in this endeavor. These flagship programs aim to ensure the practice of resources-sharing and institutional partnership between Taiwan and the NSP partners. In additions, other ministries and agencies of the EY, though, are not directly executing these five flagship programs, they still play a crucial role in implementing the NSP within their own portfolios, such as Hakka Affairs Council (HAC) actively promotes the NSP in connecting Taiwan's Hakka villages/communities with the overseas counterparts in the region; the Ministry of Culture (MOC) promoting NSP to enhance cooperation and exchanges among cultural and art communities, including film festivals, art exhibitions, museums, and artist exchanges, National Science and Technology Council establishing overseas NSP R&D centers in the fields of natural sciences, social science and humanities based on shared interests. Moreover, Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior (MOI) plays a multifaceted role, encompassing diverse portfolios and policy domains, while emphasizing people-centered policy initiatives. For instance, the National Immigration Agency (NIA) diligently attends to the welfare of Southeast Asian immigrants in Taiwan. Simultaneously, the MOI's Construction and Planning Agency (CPA) actively promotes Taiwan's top-tier construction projects within the region. Additionally, the National Fire Agency (NFA) is particularly dedicated to fostering disaster prevention collaboration between Taiwan and its NSP partner countries.

All three agencies have demonstrated commendable achievements through tangible people-to-people exchanges and capacity-building initiatives. These efforts empower Taiwan and its NSP partners to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation on shared interests. Domestically, for example, the NIA actively supports the Southeast Asian immigrants in local communities; externally, NFA and CPA have strategically contributed to the NSP by enhancing governance and the service quality within NSP partner governments. They achieve this by elevating officials' and elites' professional knowledge on good governance and fostering an appreciation for Taiwan's practices. For example, in terms of exchanges and cooperation

in fire prevention and disaster preparedness, Vietnam and the Philippines are Taiwan's key partner countries, particularly focusing on research and capacity-building programs among officials and experts. By providing Taiwanese expertise, equipment and facilities, Taiwan is sharing its resources (sharing warmth) with partners in need, ensuring that partners in need receive essential support.

Specific instances of NSP engagement in fire prevention and disaster preparedness encompass various forms of collaboration. These engagements can be classified into at least three types. The first involves mutual visits and small-scale bilateral exchange programs tailored for fire protection and police personnel. For example, Taiwan's NFA, in partnership with the Taiwan Fire Protection Safety Center (CFPSC) Foundation, organized a training program for fire and police personnel and experts from the Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam. The program focused on capacity building endeavors encompassing fire prevention measures, operational proficiency with advanced fire safety equipment, and a comprehensive understanding of fire protection and disaster prevention regulations, etc.

The second form of engagement involves the organization of NSP regional programs with participants across the NSP countries. In addition to bilateral cooperation and exchange projects, Taiwan's NFA has actively conducted specific professional training programs for fire protection personnel and experts from different NSP countries in the past few years. These programs specifically address the common challenges associated with lifesaving in dynamic waters, an increasingly prominent global focus. Taiwan has taken a pioneering role in organizing these programs with high-tech focus to significantly enhance knowledge and operational skills in water rescue.

For instance, Taiwan's NFA organized a rapids lifesaving training instructor class (the NSP class) in 2019 to assist fire protection personnel from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and other ASEAN countries. This NSP class not only demonstrated Taiwan's experience in disaster relief and training in rapids but also deepened the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) cooperation between Taiwan and the NSP partner countries. This collaborative effort aimed to contribute to the development of regional disaster relief coordination mechanisms. A notable aspect was the widespread use of Taiwan-manufactured water and fire protection equipment during the training sessions. This approach familiarized trainees from NSP partner countries with Taiwan-made rapid and fire protection equipment,

potentially facilitating the export of related products to these countries.

Finally, another significant initiative involves the implementation of mid-term to long-term training programs for disaster prevention personnel and officials at Taiwan's Zhushan Base, which has garnered significant interest among NSP partners. Taiwan's NFA, in particular, has been actively engaged in comprehensive capacity-building programs in recent years. Prior to the implementation of the NSP, the NFA conducted workshops and training classes spanning from 2010-18. Notably, these sessions provided basic fire rescue training to over 300 Filipino Chinese youths. Then, the NFA extended its regional outreach by focusing on engagement within ethnic Chinese communities. Nevertheless, the NFA's capacity-building programs have significantly evolved, now encompassing an extensive range of participants beyond the ethnic Chinese communities. This expansion warmly embraces a broader spectrum of stakeholders and officials from the mainstream society, encompassing junior/mid-career fire and disaster prevention and fire executive officials as well as senior-level decision-makers from the Philippines and other NSP partner countries. In response to the escalating compound hazards globally, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, the NSP's Disaster Prevention capacity-building programs have been meticulously tailored to address regional needs. These programs cover a diverse array of themes and topics, ranging from acquiring new skills to implementing coordinated measures against compound hazards, petrochemical disaster rescue,⁵ fire rescue, urban rescue, and emergency medical response. These comprehensive programs span over 40 hours of intensive training sessions and engagement activities. Moreover, Taiwan's NSP disaster prevention collaboration extends beyond the Philippines to neighboring ASEAN countries such as Vietnam, and hopefully to other ASEAN countries, fostering cooperation among nations with shared interests and mutual concerns in the realm of disaster prevention.

The effectiveness of Taiwan's NSP disaster prevention capacity-building programs with their distinct attributed stems from Taiwan's exceptional programs, notably its specialized training base in Zhushan (public sector), high-quality equipment (manufactured by the private sector) and a pool of seasoned instructors and experts drawn from both public and people sectors. In particular, the Zhushan base located in central Taiwan, stands as the NFA's primary fire disaster prevention training facility.⁶ Its remarkable scale ranks it as the third largest globally and the largest in Asia. The founding

director of NFA Zhushan base, Mr. Huan-chang Hsiao, currently serving as the Director-General of the NFA has been keen to strategize the role and capacity of Zhushan base in advancing regional disaster preparedness and fire prevention cooperation in line with the NSP.

This Zhushan base under the leadership of Director-general Hsiao has emerged as a pivotal cornerstone for Taiwan's NSP disaster prevention cooperation. Leveraging its significant edge in disaster prevention and fire protection facilities, Taiwan, in its commitment to cooperating with NSP partners, signed the "Taiwan-Philippines Disaster Prevention Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding" in 2021, aiming to fortify bilateral ties in disaster prevention efforts. In 2022, the Philippine Fire Administration led a delegation of more than 30 personnel to the Zhushan base for receiving training programs, including important topics such as fire rescue, rope rescue, car accidents, heavy rescue and rapid rescue teams. Subsequently, in 2023, the Philippines is expected to recommend officials to attend two more disaster prevention capacity-building programs, including metro and subway rescue, visiting disaster facilities at the Taoyuan Aerotropolis, and taking part in disaster drills on Taiwan's National Disaster Prevention Day. These exchanges facilitate the participation of senior and mid-level officials from various provinces in the Philippines, signifying the expansion of Taiwan's beneficial programs across different localities within the Philippines. As these trained individuals return home and apply their acquired knowledge and skills in daily operations, the local fire administration in the Philippines will enhance its capacity to deliver quality services, directly benefiting a larger segment of the Filipino populace.

Building upon the successful training programs, the Zhushan base is poised not only to function as an NSP training center for disaster prevention, but also intends to establish itself as a pivotal hub for capacity-building initiatives across the Indo-Pacific region. This aligns with Taiwan's collaborative approach with its Indo-Pacific partners in advancing disaster prevention cooperation, particularly emphasizing the involvement of third-party entities in the NSP cooperation, which stands as a new focal point.

In response to the partnership between Taiwan and the United States, Taiwan's NFA and MOFA jointly organized an international training camp in 2017 under the Taiwan-US "Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF)".

First, in response to the cooperation between Taiwan and the United States, Taiwan's NFA and MOFA jointly organized an international training camp under the Taiwan-led "Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF)" in 2017. This initiative welcomed mid-career and senior officials responsible for handling humanitarian aid and disaster response from 14 Asia-Pacific countries, notably Taiwan's NSP partner nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, both highly susceptible to natural disasters. Officials responsible for disaster prevention, fire protection, and other relevant departments from these 14 countries, including the Philippines, converged in Taiwan to partake in the comprehensive training workshops. Beyond the Taiwan-US GCTF collaboration on HA/DR issues, the Taiwan-Japan cooperation in disaster prevention holds strategic significance. The signing of the "Memorandum of Strengthening Disaster Prevention and Protection Business Exchange and Cooperation" in 2015 between Taiwan and Japan underscores the commitment to mutual partnership in disaster prevention and fire protection. This pact involves sharing experiences, offering mutual support, and facilitating information exchange, contributing significantly to NSP-related disaster prevention cooperation. In 2022, during the disaster prevention capacity-building programs at the Zhushan base between Taiwan and the Philippines, Taiwan's NFA extended invitations to esteemed instructors from the Tokyo Fire Department in Japan. These instructors shared invaluable experiences, fostering not only Taiwan-Japan disaster prevention cooperation but also facilitating substantial exchanges between firefighting agencies from all three countries. Anticipations are high for the involvement of Japanese instructors in the upcoming 2023 programs, aiming to further enhance these collaborative efforts.

Taiwan's robust disaster prevention system and the distinctive performance of its port fire brigades have garnered recognition from its neighboring countries. The effective operations of the port fire brigades in Keelung, Taichung, Hualien, and Kaohsiung ports are also acknowledged as models for future-proof. These achievements emphasize the importance of further strengthening key areas within the new southbound cooperation. Recently, Taiwan and the Philippines entered into a "Memorandum of Understanding on Port Affairs Cooperation" to jointly work on port development and management, enhance port security, implement disaster prevention, and ensure port environmental maintenance.

B. The Private Sector Creates Business Opportunities

In the aforementioned training programs, participants were introduced to state-of-the-art disaster prevention equipment manufactured in Taiwan, providing them with hands-on experience in their utilization. This interactive approach enabled instructors to directly showcase top-tier Taiwanese products to visiting officials and instructors. It also facilitated discussions about potential follow-up procurement plans. Such moves have the potential to pave the way for substantial business opportunities for the private sector and enterprises.

It is worth noting that industries related to fire protection, disaster prevention, and security in a broad sense are also actively cooperating with the NSP stakeholders by jointly organizing annual exhibitions. These exhibitions, frequented by numerous international buyers beyond the NSP stakeholders, serve as platforms to showcase Taiwan's high-quality products and equipment. For example, the Taipei International Security Technology Application Expo (Secutech series) is an important annual event for promoting Taiwan made commodities and equipment of disaster prevention. This exhibition also hosts the Asia-Pacific Smart Transportation Exhibition, Taipei International Fire and Disaster Prevention Application Exhibition, Asia-Pacific Information Security Forum and Exhibition, SMABIoT Taipei International Smart IoT Building Application and Electromechanical Air Conditioning Exhibition, and the Asia-Pacific Disaster Prevention Summit Forum with policy implications, etc. With the support and participation of enterprises, the private sector work together to advocate Taiwan's high-quality products (hardware) and experience (software or practical know-how) to the international community. These exhibitions serve as a catalyst, fortifying Taiwan's best practice in smart disaster prevention, integrating safety technology across borders with artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT)/information and communication, automation, sensing, electromechanical and fire protection system technologies, and implementing them in transportation, construction, disaster prevention, factories, etc. industry field. Private sector stakeholders leverage these platforms to champion Taiwan's model of "safety technology, smart application" and display the cutting-edge technology and multifaceted solutions to the global audience. In addition to the exhibition, it is particularly worth mentioning that paralleled with the Secutech exhibitions, the disaster prevention summit and forum jointly organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

and think tanks also raised the public awareness on disaster prevention and strategized preparedness actions to policy-level dialogue.

It is important to pinpoint that the highlight of Taiwan's private sector strength in the NSP disaster prevention cooperation in the past few years has been its smart/innovative equipment and facilities for disaster prevention and the application of cutting-edge technology to promote preparations, which are regarded as areas where Taiwan's enterprises and companies of disaster prevention have comparative advantages. For example, in 2022, the Taiwan Fire Protection Development and Exchange Association was established by the Ambassador-at-large for Digital NSP, Dr. Lin Jia-long. During his tenure as Taichung City mayor, he successfully coordinated a number of enterprises located in Taichung and nearby localities, contributing to producing smart disaster prevention equipment. At the inauguration of the association, it also launched the "Indo-Pacific City and Local Resilience Cooperation Alliance Declaration." On one hand, it showcased Taiwan's interconnected smart machinery industry through the alliance; simultaneously, it highlighted the synergy between private sector and people sector in advancing the NSP in disaster prevention cooperation.

Moreover, it is imperative to draw comparison between Taiwan's approach with Japan's regarding the private sector's efforts. Both Taiwan and Japan serve as significant examples, actively developing civil and industrial partnerships to enhance disaster preparedness. Japan has been at the forefront of integrating the disaster prevention industry within local communities, exemplified in regions like Kochi Prefecture (Kochi 2022). This integration has played a pivotal role in bolstering social resilience and disaster prevention readiness, aligning the disaster prevention industries with local economic revitalization efforts. However, Taiwan's local communities differ from those in Japan in a significant way. One notable distinction lies in the fact that while most of Taiwan's disaster prevention industries consist of small and medium-sized enterprises, they do not operate in a community-based manner akin to Japan's model. Regarding Taiwan's practice, the enterprises produce quality products for disaster prevention, particularly in manufacturing smart disaster prevention equipment. In Taiwan's approach, there is a concerted effort, bolstered by government support, to empower local communities in establishing self-reliant disaster preparedness measures, particularly in response to challenges like floods. In essence, while Japan focuses on local economic revitalization as part of its disaster resilience

strategy, Taiwan's approach centers on reinforcing resilience through mobilization and cultivating self-resilient disaster prevention experiences.

C. The People's Sector as the Interface and Supportive Network

While disaster prevention stands as a critical national policy, essential for fostering good governance and ensuring national security, both Taiwan and its neighboring ASEAN neighbors continually grapple with the persistent threat of natural disasters. Relying solely on government-led disaster prevention measures may prove unrealistic. Nevertheless, the contribution and efforts made by civil society (or the people sector) to disaster prevention should not be overlooked. Hence, it becomes imperative to emphasize the significance of mutual learning, forging partnerships across various stakeholders, and even advancing joint regional initiatives at the grassroots level through the NSP, thereby leveraging social connectivity.

Civilian efforts in disaster preparedness exhibit three distinct features: foremost among these is the enduring practice of local disaster prevention momentum and the mobilization of self-reliant social networks for disaster preparedness- an integral aspect of Taiwan's best practice domestically which has been highly recognized as the exemplar of the bottom-up approach for disaster preparedness build-up at local level. Taiwan's Local communities boast extensive experience in establishing community-based self-reliant taskforces dedicated to disaster prevention against floods. Presently, there are over 540 disaster prevention communities in Taiwan. Their operational code and practices have garnered recognition from neighboring countries, especially those countries lacking widespread access to high-tech equipment and disaster prevention capabilities, such as Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand. Community leaders and experts from the abovementioned countries have also actively exchanged with and learned from Taiwan's model community-based taskforces through various non-governmental channels.

Second, NGOs serve as the interface for the NSP disaster prevention cooperation. These stakeholders actively publicize the roles and success stories of Taiwanese communities and local actors in the ongoing process of enhancing disaster prevention capacity and resilience. Encouraging progress has been witnessed at the grassroots level in recent years. In particular, the Taiwan Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF) has embraced regional resilience, centered on disaster prevention, as its fifth core action plan within the

NSP. The strategic addition complements its existing focuses on the young leaders' engagement, policy communities and think tank collaboration, social connectivity as well as art and cultural exchanges. The disaster prevention exchanged and cooperation project by TAEF commenced during the Asia Dialogue in November 2018, which was jointly organized by TAEF, Pan-Asia Risk and Insurance Management Association (PARIMA), and Taipei Medical University (TMU), and Yilan Meizhou Community taskforce for disaster preparedness. The dialogue was instrumental in devising a practical roadmap for building comprehensive and resilient organizations and infrastructures through government and local communities, while sharing the experience on preventing both natural and man-made disasters with regional stakeholders. At the same time, TAEF also hosted a delegating including disaster prevention personnel from Indonesia, Myanmar and Japan to Meizhou community in Yilan to interact with local disaster prevention teams as well as to promote dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders. Furthermore, in November 2022, TAEF executed a bilateral exchange program with the Australian Institute of International Affairs. As part of this program, TAEF led a delegation from the AIIA, which included disaster prevention experts, on a visit to Yilan's Meizhou community for an interaction with the core members of the disaster prevention team. The AIIA delegation was deeply impressed by the Meizhou taskforce for disaster preparedness, recognizing its effective measures in preparing and significantly reducing the neighborhood losses during natural disasters. Particularly noteworthy was the taskforce's streamlined approach, employing actions with the least technological threshold, a significant consideration in Taiwan's aging society. Following their visit, upon their return to Australia, the delegation shared the remarkable experience with relevant government agencies. In addition, in May 2023, TAEF organized an international Forum on "Comparing Democratic Governance between Taiwan and India: Issues and Prospects" in partnership with the department of defense and strategic studies of Pune University and Flame University in Pune, India. Taiwan's best practices in community-based disaster resilience and environmental governance became the focus for the Indian participants.

As a NSP think tank, TAEF does not only serve as an interface that bridges the regional connectivity of disaster prevention through grassroot channels, but also actively engages in policy dialogues and summits featured with disaster prevention and resilience. This underscores both the importance

the cross-sectoral partnership and TAEF's proactive role in spearheading international networking for the NSP disaster prevention cooperation. More importantly, TAEF launched the Asian Resilience Consortium (ARC), inviting medical university (such as Taipei Medical University), private sector (such as the Taiwan Disaster Prevention Industry Association), and the exhibition company (such as the Messe Frankfurt) to jointly promote disaster prevention and resilience such as organizing Secutech exhibitions series.

For example, at the Secutech exhibition in 2019, alongside showcasing an array of top-notch firefighting and disaster prevention equipment and facilities- representing Taiwan's hardware-TAEF ensured the inclusion of best practice from local disaster preparedness communities, symbolizing Taiwan's soft and warm power in line with the NSP. Serving as a co-organizer, TAEF extended a special invitation to Yilan's Meizhou Community, renowned a model community of disaster preparedness in Taiwan, to participate in the exhibition and share their successful stories to the international audience (Yang and Wu, 2020).

In addition, TAEF collaborated with the ARC members to jointly organize the 2019 Asia Pacific Smart Disaster Prevention Summit as a practice of cross-sectoral partnership. The summit welcomed senior officials and representatives from Taiwan's Office of Disaster Management at the Executive Yuan, and the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) of the Philippines, disaster prevention officials from the Philippines, Vietnam Institute of Geosciences and Mineral Resources (VIGMR), and representatives from the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Myanmar, were also in attendance, fostering direct exchanges of viewpoints and experiences. The discussions revolved around critical topics and future challenges faced by Asian countries in disaster management, including but not limited to cross-border cooperation for large-scale disaster management in Asia and the role of public-private partnerships in disaster management, accompanied by shared experiences.

Since then, Secutech has evolved into an annual event for Taiwan, serving as a platform to promote cross-sectoral partnerships for NSP disaster prevention cooperation. Despite the cancellations of the 2020 and 2021 exhibition due to the COVID-19 pandemic, upon its resumption in 2022, the event once again elevated the discourse on disaster prevention. It actively engaged diplomatic envoys and foreign representatives in Taiwan, facilitating discussions with local stakeholders on public-private

collaboration and regional resilience amid the climate emergency. In the 2023 edition of Asian Disaster Prevention Forum, the Deputy Mayor of Bangkok was invited to speak online to highlight the importance of smart disaster prevention during Bangkok floods and the promotion of innovative digital platforms. Furthermore, the forum prioritized illustrating Taiwan’s successful experiences in disaster prevention efforts within industrial parks and science parks among NSP partners.

As a pioneering think tank for the NSP, TAEF’s efforts in facilitating NSP disaster prevention cooperation transcend beyond the Secutech exhibitions. Since 2018, the foundation has actively curated exchanges and dialogues. Notably in 2019 TAEF organized a special session on themed “Asian Disaster Prevention Partnership” as part of its signature platform — the Yushan Forum. The platform featured distinguished speakers such as Mikio Ishiwatari, Senior Advisor on Disaster Management and Water Resource Management, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); Wilberto Rico Neil A. Kwan Tiu, Regional Director, Bureau of Fire Protection-National Capital Region, the Philippines; and Dr. Hongey Chen, Regional Director, National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (NCDR), Taiwan. These engagement and dialogues indeed help strengthen cooperation between Taiwan and neighboring countries in curating the regional awareness of disaster preparedness among NSP partners as well as facilitate the practice of a disaster prevention community for all stakeholders.

Table 1. TAEF Efforts in Forums and Summits for the NSP Disaster Prevention Cooperation

2023/4/26	2023 Asia Disaster Prevention Forum: Disaster Resilience Through Civil Preparedness Under Uncertainty
2022	2022 Asia Disaster Prevention Forum: Public-Private Partnership and Regional Resilience Building Under Climate Crisis
2021/4/22	2021 Asia-Pacific Disaster Management Summit: Regional Resilience and International Cooperation in Climate Emergency
<i>Secutech 2020 and Secutech 2021 postponed due to Covid-19</i>	
2018/11/6	2018 Asian Dialogues: Building Resilience in the Face of Disasters
2019/10/9	2019 Yushan Forum: Special Session on Building the partnership for Asia Disaster Preparedness
2019/5/8	2019 Asia Pacific Smart Disaster Prevention Summit

Source: Compilation by Author.

3. Conclusion

Given the prevalent threats posed by disasters across Indo-Pacific countries, disaster resilience has emerged as a shared interests between Taiwan and its NSP partner countries. In the past few years, Taiwan's NSP has actively emphasized disaster prevention preparations. However, government-to-government cooperation in disaster prevention is obstructed due to the potential involvement of sensitive security issues, especially concerning transnational personnel mobilization and coordination among different governments. Moreover, political pressure from Beijing's imposition of the One China Policy, make it particularly challenging for ASEAN countries to develop official ties with Taiwan. However, Taiwan's pragmatic approach and commitment to promote capacity-building program for disaster prevention and fire prevention officials and personnel not only meets the demands of partner countries, but also contributes to the build-up of institutional frameworks for collaboration that leads to solid partnerships on less sensitive functional governance issues.

The involvement of the private sector and civil society in the NSP not only generates profits for enterprises but also extends the regional market and enhances the international influence of Taiwanese products. Collaborative efforts within Team Taiwan's disaster prevention industry networking have proven successful in recent years. Moreover, the contributions of NGO stakeholders and civil society in disaster resilience, facilitated by think tanks, have significantly bolstered the branding of Taiwan's NSP in disaster prevention and preparedness. This underscores the distinction between Taiwan's people-centered NSP approach with cross-sectoral partnerships and the strategies of neighboring countries. The emphasis on such collaborations within the NSP disaster prevention cooperation reflects that the diplomacy of a small and middle power necessitates not just flexibility and pragmatism but also meaningful cooperation. Thanks to these innovative cross-sectoral efforts, NSP partner countries have expressed their willingness to craft meaningful cooperation, while the Philippines and Vietnam responded most enthusiastically. Although other countries have also expressed their willingness to cooperate, there are still some challenges ahead to overcome jointly.

Of course, although the aforementioned cooperation achievements are encouraging, it is not without challenges. This study contends that at this stage, the NSP disaster prevention cooperation, in terms of its essence, has

encountered three major challenges. First, Taiwan must expand to more countries as partners of NSP disaster prevention cooperation. To engage more partners is not easy, especially when it comes to government-to-government cooperation. Taiwan's foreign relations have long been limited by the pressure faced by individual partner countries imposed by China. This also makes it difficult for Taiwan to promote inter-governmental agreements of NSP disaster prevention cooperation with partner countries. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to win more cooperative countries at this stage. Nevertheless, this study argues that ongoing cooperation with the Philippines and Vietnam can become the "best practice" once tangible results have been achieved. It will contribute to help resolve the concerns of other NSP partner countries, ASEAN countries in particular, and jointly figure out the pragmatic approaches to effectively respond to the political pressure imposed by China.

Second, how to upgrade the disaster prevention cooperation beyond one-time cooperation and training programs toward a more institutionalized approach, which will involve the firm commitment of both parties in terms of investing resources, rather than just Taiwan's unilateral endorsement. This study argues that the establishment of an ecosystem for disaster prevention cooperation in which the private sector can provide cutting-edge technologies and innovative equipment, which will be of important incentive for more partner countries. In addition, if cooperative mechanisms and communication channels can be established between early career personnel, senior executive officers and high-level decision-makers, it will further consolidate bilateral progress.

Third, ongoing cooperation is mostly bilateral in nature, and it is not easy to promote multilateral or multilateral frameworks. This study argues that the facilitation of the third party's involvement (such as Japan and the United States) might be the driver to advance the regional framework of disaster prevention cooperation that includes Taiwan.

Finally, considering the concerns of its partners, Taiwan rarely actively articulates the achievement of the NSP disaster prevention cooperation as well as the bilateral collaborative achievements, albeit its people-centered rationale. In any case, the content of NSP disaster prevention cooperation must be effective, innovative, and attractive in order to make Taiwan indispensable in leading the regional disaster prevention through its P-P-P-P practice of the NSP so as to strive for more international cooperation.

Notes

1. In the policy planning stage, the NSP was aimed at diversifying the economic risk of overreliance on one market, that is, China. As being implemented for seven years, the outcome of the NSP has gone beyond the original setting on risk diversification and to advance a multi-faceted partnership with the partner countries in the region and the like-minded countries in the world (Hsiao and Yang, 2022).
2. The first southwards engagement of Taiwan can be traced back to the Go South Policy of President Lee Teng-hui in the mid-1990s. Compared with its earlier edition in the 1990s, the NSP moves beyond the geographic setting and being realized as a regional approach, or Taiwan's own Indo-pacific strategy, see Hsiao and Yang (2022:22-23).
3. Since 2017 South Korea also implemented its New Southern Policy (NSP-K) as a strategic move to diversify the economic risk against China.
4. Warm power refers to sharing warmth, in terms of resources and experiences to like-minded countries and partners in need. It also aims at making Taiwan central in its neighbors' daily discussion and making Taiwan indispensable in the everyday life of its partners (Hsiao and Yang, 2022: 16).
5. The author took part in the JTP Training Program for Executive Officer on November 24 and joined the petrochemical disaster prevention training. Even some senior executive officers were willing to Even senior officials are willing to pick up water hoses and lined up to the front line to put out fires caused by accidents. They expressed that they can "learn more efficient techniques and knowledge from the program, which can ensure the safety of people and protect their firefighter brothers." (interview with Executive Officer L on November 24, 2023).
6. In Zhushan Base, the most advanced, complete simulation physical training grounds have been built. There are a total of 66 types of rescue training facilities in 13 categories including Various simulated building fire rescue training ground, outdoor fire rescue skills training ground, air respirator training ground, petrochemical and oil tank

disaster rescue training ground, ship disaster accident rescue training ground, aviation disaster rescue training ground, railway rapid transit and underground yards station disaster accident rescue training ground, highway and long tunnel disaster accident rescue training ground, earthquake disaster rescue training ground are equipped with physical building collapse model, landslide disaster rescue training ground, as well as water, underwater and rapids lifesaving training ground.

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